

NOAA FISHERIES ADJUSTS THE ATLANTIC BLUEFIN TUNA DAILY RETENTION LIMITS FOR THE ANGLING AND GENERAL CATEGORY FISHERIES

NOAA Fisheries adjusts the daily retention limits for the Angling and General category fisheries for Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) for the 2003 fishing year that began June 1, 2003, and ends May 31, 2004. Vessels permitted in the Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Angling and the Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat categories are eligible to land BFT under the BFT Angling category quotas. Vessels permitted in the Atlantic tunas General category and Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat categories are eligible to land BFT under the BFT General category quotas. This action is being taken to provide increased fishing opportunities in all areas without risking overharvest in each category.

Since June 1, 2003, the Angling category daily retention limit of one school, large school, or small medium BFT (measuring 27 to less than 73 inches curved fork length) per vessel has been in effect for all vessels fishing under the Angling category quota, and apply until the effective date of this current catch limit adjustment. *Effective June 15 through October 31, 2003, NOAA Fisheries adjusts the daily retention limit for all areas to **one BFT per person with a maximum of six BFT per vessel**, in any combination of the school, large school, or small medium size classes (measuring 27 to less than 73 inches curved fork length).* This limit applies to all vessels permitted in the Atlantic HMS Angling category and to vessels permitted in the Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat category.

NOAA Fisheries has also determined that a retention limit adjustment is warranted for Coast Guard Inspected Headboats to provide increased fishing and data collection opportunities in all areas without risking overharvest of the Angling category quota. For headboats, defined as vessels that possess an Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat category permit and that are inspected and licenced by the Coast Guard to carry more than six passengers, the daily retention limit, effective August 15, 2003 through October 31, 2003, is adjusted to one BFT per passenger (not including Captain and crew) in any combination of the school, large school or small medium size classes, with a maximum of 35 fish per vessel.

General category landings rates have been slow to date in the Atlantic BFT fishery. Based on a review of dealer reports, current and historical daily landing trends, and the availability of BFT on the fishing grounds, NOAA Fisheries has determined that an increase in the daily retention limit in the General category is warranted in order to provide an opportunity to harvest the June through August subquota in its designated time-period. Therefore, NOAA Fisheries adjusts the daily retention limit for the June through August time-period to two large medium or giant BFT per vessel. The increase in the daily retention limit is effective June 15 through August 31, 2003. The General category daily retention limit will revert back to one large medium or giant BFT on September 1, 2003.

The following table summarizes the adjusted daily retention limits for BFT for the 2003

fishing year.

PERMIT CATEGORY	BFT DAILY RETENTION LIMIT
Atlantic tunas General (Effective 06/15/2003-08/31/2003)	TWO fish per vessel measuring 73 inches curved fork length or larger
Atlantic tunas Angling (Effective 06/15/2003-10/31/2003)	ONE fish per angler , measuring 27 to less than 73 inches curved fork length with a maximum of 6 fish per vessel
Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat AND uninspected and licensed by the United States Coast Guard to carry 6 persons or less (Effective 06/15/2003-10/31/2003)	ONE fish per angler , measuring 27 to less than 73 inches curved fork length with a maximum of 6 fish per vessel
Atlantic HMS Charter/Headboat AND inspected and licensed by the United States Coast Guard to carry more than 6 persons (Effective 08/15/2003-10/31/2003)	ONE fish per passenger (not including Captain and crew), measuring 27 to less than 73 inches curved fork length, with a maximum of 35 fish per vessel

Effective November 1, 2003 through May 31, 2004, the Angling category daily retention limit will be one large school or small medium BFT per vessel, for all vessels fishing under the Angling category quota.

The Angling category trophy fishery for large medium and giant BFT (measuring 73 inches or greater) remains open, with a retention limit of one fish per vessel per year.

All BFT landed under the Angling category quota **MUST** be reported within 24 hours of landing to the NOAA Fisheries Automated Catch Reporting System by calling 888-872-8862 or, if landed in the states of North Carolina or Maryland, to a reporting station prior to offloading. Information about these state harvest tagging programs, including reporting station locations, can be obtained in North Carolina by calling (800) 338-7804, and in Maryland by calling (410) 213-1531.

Depending on the level of fishing effort and catch rates of BFT, NOAA Fisheries may determine that an interim closure or additional retention limit adjustments are necessary to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas. Closures or subsequent adjustments to the daily retention limits, if any, shall be announced through publication in the Federal Register. In addition, permit holders may call the Atlantic Tunas Information Line at (888) 872-8862 or (978) 281-9305 for updates on quota monitoring and retention limit adjustments.

This FAX notice is a courtesy to BFT fishery permit holders to help keep you informed about your fishery. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register. For further information contact Brad McHale, 978-281-9260.

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